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UNDER A CLOUD; —OR— CLEARING HIMSELF.

The Thrilling and Absorbing Story
of a Great Crime.

BY JENNIE DAVIS BERTON,
AUTHOR OF "HER LIFE'S STORY," AND
OTHER STORIES.

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CHAPTER XVII.—CONTINUED.

"I'd rather not go to all," murmured Carol,
with the tears coming into her eyes.

"Oh, nonsense, after I have engaged it
all."

"Now, do you know," put in Ingot, "I
rather admire Miss Carol's good sense. I'd
as soon stay here and listen to her as to
Kellor; a pretty young woman is better
than a fat old one any day of the year. I'm
agreeable either way."

Thus driven, Carol decided to go, of
course. Any thing was preferable to
an evening alone with Mr. Ingot. That
gentleman understood her motive, and
though outwardly pleasant as ever, he was
raging within.

"She hates me like poison and don't
trouble herself to hide it. I'll have to put
on the thumbscrews to bring her to time.
I'd rather be shot for it than to let her
but there's no other way. I'm getting
myself into a humor to make short work
of the business, and Childer shall help me."

He kept up a running fire of conversation,
with the idea of making himself agreeable,
all through the evening.

"Can't say that I like this sort of thing
myself," he observed. "Why can't they do
their porrovering in English so every body
could understand it. They do in the
Mikado, now! That's the style of thing
takes me. I reckon they would call Clara
Louise a fine woman, but I know a girl that's
a sight more to my taste. Couldn't guess
who, could you?"

"Hush, please," entreated Carol, and
kept her attention fixed on the stage to the
exclusion of her unwelcome escort. But Ingot
was not to be so easily repulsed. He took
advantage of the fact that the curtain
came down to break out again.

"Most dazles one's eyes with her dia-
monds, don't she? You wouldn't think now
that I had an interest in diamonds, but I
have. I'm thinking of the way to get a
ring, for a lady. Which would you advise,
a solitaire or a cluster?"

"I'll leave you to judge of such matters."

"Well, but you know which you like best,"
he persisted. "Faint as if I were
enough of to get more than one, and I'm
bound to have something of value that's
fit for the person I intend to go to. I wouldn't
like to find that I'm just a fool."

"You had better consult the lady her-
self," said Carol coldly.

"That's what I'm doing," returned Ingot,
with the utmost composure. "You don't
suppose I would go to buying diamond rings
for any one else, I hope. I'm just a fool."

Carol's patience was exhausted at last.

"Let me tell you, that I will never
accept such a gift from you!" she cried, in
a guarded tone, but with the angry color
flaming in her cheeks. "Oh, I wish Lyman
would come! I wonder what keeps him!"

"Something that holds me, being with the
girl he likes best in the world. And let me
tell you that you will wear my ring, and that
before Christmas is here, or it will be the
worst for you—I don't want to make threats,
but you'll wear it," he broke off, and there was
a savage tone in his voice, a look on his
face, which made the girl's heart quail.

She had read of men murdering the women
they loved, when they were not married,
and she was not sure that she was not
being threatened with a similar fate.

Carol's intention of speaking to her
brother was frustrated for that night, for
Ingot followed them in, without invitation.

"I want a word with you, Childer. You're
so precious about your own account now,
today that I don't know when I'll get an-
other chance at you."

The two passed into the den together and
were still there when Carol's eyes closed in
beautiful slumber.

Lyman was in the breakfast-room when
she came down the next morning, having
risen early, determined to broach the dis-
agreeable subject. He took the words out
of her mouth by saying to her, "Carol, I
told you, that I would make it happen."

"Ingot tells me that he made what he
considers as good as a proposal of marriage
last night, Carol, and that he did not urge
an answer because he wanted to give you
time to think the matter over. I scarcely
think you are inclined to regard him favor-
ably, my dear!"

"You must know that I utterly detest
him, Lyman."

"Detest! That is a strong word. I hope
you have your feelings sufficiently under
control to hide the fact from him, for a time,
at least. I think you would make a sacrifice
for me, Carol, if I were to assure you that it
is necessary and for a worthy purpose."

"If he asks me to do anything to accept that
man," she declared.

"But if it is only to seem to accept him
I give you my word that I shall never ask
you to marry him. He is not the man I
would choose for my husband, if I wanted
to influence your choice. This is a thing I
shall never do, little sister. Your own
heart must be your guide, and if that be
fixed even upon one whom I detest, I promise
you that I will never raise an objection."

The bright head dropped, and a blush
crept into the clear cheeks.

"Must I explain to you why I am asking
this of you, Carol? You are such a child in
the ways of the world, you know so little
about business matters, that I doubt if you
would understand the importance I attach
to keeping in with Ingot. This I will say,
that he is deeply indebted to Mr. Everleigh's
embarrassments, which I find have not
straightened them out as I first anticipated. Ingot
could do us much harm if he were to break
with us now, but in a few weeks more we
can afford to declare ourselves independent
of him. By the way, Carol, you were
good enough to give me an unconditional
promise the other night regarding Berg-
man, but I will modify that by letting you
do as you please about him. I'll even be
identical with him for your sake, if you ask
it—after this affair with Ingot is over.
Until then, I shall hold you to your word,
already given, and beg of you further to
hold by keeping Ingot complaisant. You
can do it without committing yourself, or
if he will have a promise, I will see that it
is never enforced. You believe me when I
say that, do you not?"

There was no wavering in the eyes that
met hers now, though they were amber
and dark, and bore signs of the sleepless
night through which he had passed.

His reasons seemed vague and unsatis-
factory to Carol. She wished he would ex-
plain more fully, but she urged it might ap-
pear like a doubt of him. Like most girls
she had been contented to let Lyman do her
thinking for her, and in return he had
been more indulgent than brothers usually

are. If she was waking now to the fact
that she had a mind of her own, she was
certainly not prepared yet to use her judg-
ment against him and maintain the same.
When Mr. Ingot came again, he did not
meet with the rebuff she had been prepared
to give. He smiled to himself, a knowing
smile, but there was a trace of bitterness
in it.

"The plan works, but I'll be hanged if I
don't wish I could get her without all this
chicanery. I've known that Lyman Childer
was a precious rascal, but the worst piece
of chicanery he has been guilty of yet is
joining in with me to sell out this con-
fiding creature. Not that I need quarrel
with him for it. I'd have made it interest-
ing for him if he hadn't, but it makes me
despise the fellow all the same."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MODERATE STUPOR into which the sick
man had fallen lasted for days.

The doctor, whom Norris sent, looked
grave when he saw him. This utter prostra-
tion of mind and body left him nothing to
work on. Unless nature interposed with
her wonderful revivifying powers, life would
waver out like a breath from the ill-used,
emaciated body which seemed already to
bear the stamp of the great change that
followed all sooner or later, yet which
might seem a welcome release to such an
existence as his.

Some such thought went through the
doctor's mind, but Bergman charged
him to spare no efforts toward the man's
recovery, so he in turn laid his charges on
the nurse.

"You are quite sure you understand your
business?" he asked, a little sharply.

"I'm not a professional, if that's what
you mean, doctor, but I've been through a
power of sickness. I'll watch him faithful-
ly, never you fear."

"Not a fair sight to look at, this corrup-
tioned body, with her gray locks, but
hidden under her closely frilled cap, but
she was strong and willing, and though ap-
parently awkward, her knotted brown
hands were tender in their office, and the
physician went away satisfied with his as-
sistant, and the events proved his in-
stincts justified.

She was untiring in her watchfulness.
The laundry and toilet articles were
given with the regularity of clock-
work. When the change came, and the pa-
tient began to roll and toss in the fever
and delirium which succeeded, she knew just
what to do, and she did it. She was a
savior, and the events proved his in-
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ordered hair stood up in short locks about
the reddening face. The detected nurse
made one wild effort to get back her dig-
nity, but she failed, and she met the
eye of Norris.

"If the cat's out of the bag, there's no
use holding it open for her."

"I don't know, Uncle Amos. You de-
fected me so dandy I can scarcely believe
my senses now."

"A nice detective you'll make if you are
taken in by every sham."

"Do you mean that you are on that kind
of business here with a sudden light
breaking over him. You don't think—
you can't think—"

"That crime can be buried in the grave
—oh, no! I'll convince you of that by the
time I am through."

Then the older man's acting gave way;
he grasped the hand of the younger as he
asserted, eagerly:

"I've got him, Norris—got him beyond a
doubt."

"Tell me what you mean, Uncle Amos!
Not Miller! You don't suspect him!"

"Of being the runaway felon, the dead-
weight on the family, the man who has
been ever with Ingot, but he was
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